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ABSTRACT

Project R.I.D.E. provides support to regular education teachers to help them deal effectively with inappropriate social and academic behaviors and to eliminate false referrals to special education. A classroom teacher survey in the Great Falls (Montana) Public Schools determined the 20 most significant classroom problems. For each problem, five proven teaching tactics were identified from best practices research. These tactics were summarized and entered onto computer disks for easy access by teachers. For tactics difficult to understand from verbal descriptions, videotapes were made modeling the techniques. If the problems persist after application of the tactics, a School Wide Assistance Team can be consulted. The teams capitalize on the wealth of good teaching and management techniques available in a school. The teams are made up of regular education teachers who meet to provide possible solutions for classroom problems referred to them. In the first year of using this process, data indicated that 82% of problem behaviors were successfully resolved by classroom teachers using the proven teaching tactics. Of the remaining problems, 12% were successfully resolved with the aid of the School Wide Assistance Team, and the final 6% (four behaviors) were referred to special education. (JDD)

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R.I.D.E. (RESPONDING TO INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES IN EDUCATION)

This process was developed by the Great Falls Public Schools, Great Falls, Montana. It is designed to provide regular education teachers with help in dealing with student learning problems, both academic and behavioral, that are found in the regular classroom.

Studies have shown that a large number of referrals to Special Education are false referrals. That is, after extensive evaluations, many students simply do not qualify for Special Education services. This creates two concerns. The first concern is that a great deal of time on the part of the Special Education staff in local districts and cooperatives is used evaluating students that are eventually determined not to qualify for services. This takes away from the time available to evaluate and instruct those students who are truly handicapped. The lag time between referral and placement of students qualifying for services is often increased because the number of referrals is high.

The second concern is that often, those students who are determined not to qualify for services after extensive evaluation, are still in the regular classroom exhibiting the same inappropriate social and academic behaviors that led to a referral to Special Education in the first place.

Project R.I.D.E. is designed to deal with those concerns. The premise of the Project is that regular education teachers, when given sufficient support, can effectively deal with many of the problems encountered in their classrooms.

Project R.I.D.E. is composed of two parts. The first part utilizes a bank of computer disks and video tapes. In Great Falls, a survey among regular classroom teachers was made to determine in priority order the twenty most significant behavioral and academic problems encountered in regular classrooms. The school district then contracted with two university professors to investigate applicable Best Practices research found in educational journals. Educational literature contains excellent, proven intervention tactics. However, these journals are often so technical that the average teacher would have neither the time, nor the patience to dig through the articles to get help with specific problems.

These professors were told to look through all the available literature and come up with at least five proven teaching tactics to deal with each of the twenty problems listed on the survey. Once the tactics were located, these individuals set out to eliminate all the technical jargon and summarize the tactics in 300 to 400 words. Once this phase was completed, the individuals working on this project had all the tactics in their new, rewritten, simplified form, put on computer disk. The

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computer program designed for this was made extremely "user friendly." Should a teacher experiencing a specific problem with one or more students need to access the computer program, it is very easy to do. By looking through the menu, the teacher can determine what tactics are available for a particular problem and read about each of them on the monitor. If the tactics look appropriate, she can print them out and have a hard copy to look over as time allows.

Each tactic follows the same format. A summary statement about the tactic is given, and a description of the target population is provided. Next, implementation procedures are discussed, showing the teacher, step by step, how to use the techniques in the classroom. Next, the reader is told how to modify the tactic for older or younger students. Also provided is the name of the journal from which the tactic was taken should the teacher want to review the original study.

To complement this tool, the district decided to develop a video tape bank which models some of the tactics presented on the computer. The tactics that were modeled were those that teachers might have the most trouble understanding and following if they had only the computer print-out to follow.

Follow-up studies of this portion of the program have shown that many of the academic and behavioral problems, which in the past would have been referred for Special Education evaluation were successfully handled in the classroom. At this point, classroom teachers totally control the process. No other individuals need be involved.

Should the the teacher continue to experience a problem even after using the computer bank and video tapes, the next step in Project R.I.D.E. would be used. This involves the classroom teacher making a referral to the School Wide Assistance Team (S.W.A.T.).

A. The premise of the S.W.A.T. team is as follows:

1. Classrooms are full of atypical kids,
2. We can all use additional ideas and resources,
3. None of us have all the answers all of the time,
4. Some kids don't qualify for Special Education, but still need help,
5. Mainstreamed students spend time in regular classrooms, and
6. Special Education teachers also need support with full-time handicapped students.

S.W.A.T. teams are made up of several regular education teachers who work in the building. These individuals are normally chosen through an informal election on the part of the entire staff. No teacher is forced to participate, but is encouraged to do so by the building administrator through private discussion. S.W.A.T. team members meet on a consultant basis, once or twice per month, in most instances. Membership rotates intermittently, but a term on the S.W.A.T Team should

last at least six months.

The referring teacher comes to the Team with the particular problem well in mind. She describes what has already been tried. At that point a "brain storming" session takes place, in which all members of the Team are free to provide suggestions on how the specific problem might be handled. A S.W.A.T. recorder writes down all the suggestions that are made during this session. When the "brain storm" session ends, the suggestions are reviewed and the referring teacher is free to accept none, some, or all of the ideas presented. At this point, the teacher decides how long she wants to try the new tactics in the classroom. Usually a time frame of two weeks is minimal to see if the tactics are going to work.

The idea behind the S.W.A.T. process is that there is a wealth of good teaching and management techniques available in any school building. This process is designed to help draw those ideas out in a systematic way. In a study of fifteen schools in three states, this process, also known as T.A.T. (Teacher Assistant Teams); was found to eliminate all false referrals to Special Education, during the time of the study.

In the first year of using this process in the Great Falls Public Schools, the following data resulted:

Of the 68 behaviors, 56 (82%) were successfully resolved by classroom teachers using R.I.D.E. tactics. Of the remaining 12 problems, 8 (12%) were successfully resolved at the building level by the teacher with the aide of the School Wide Assistance Team. The remaining 4 behaviors (6%) were referred to Special Education.

Even though this project was developed in a large school district in Montana, the system can be very beneficial in smaller rural school systems such as those that comprise the Yellowstone-West/Carbon County Special Services Cooperative.

It should be noted that while this process was developed to assist regular education teachers, deal with their atypical students, it has also been of substantial help to Special Education Teachers who are experiencing specific problems in their classes.

In no way is the program to be represented to regular education teachers as a "road block" to getting services from Special Education. It is designed to provide assistance to teachers that have not been readily available in the past.

Inservice time normally consists of one, day long workshop where the principles of the program are laid out. It may also require some follow up with administrator and building staff to make sure the process is being carried out correctly.

Administrative support is essential to the success of R.I.D.E. The administrator must provide time for the School Wide Assistance Team to meet, and she should consider the function of the S.W.A.T. Team to be as important as any other duty shared by building teachers. A supportive administrator will encourage referrals to S.W.A.T. Teams and be available to lend her expertise when requested.

Administrators should, however, be cautious not to place themselves into to a

leadership role in actual S.W.A.T. meetings. Previous experience has shown that teaching staff are often hesitant to offer suggestions for fear that those suggestions may sound too odd or out of place to the administrator. Administrators as well as Special Education personnel, (School Psychologists, Resource Teachers, Consultants) can and should be prepared to offer help to the S.W.A.T. personnel for particularly difficult problems, when they are requested.

In conclusion:

In rural areas especially, there are often few resources that regular education teachers can call upon for help. The videos and computer bank, as well as the S.W.A.T. process, help to fill the gap often found in these schools.

Further information on Project R.I.D.E. can be obtained by contacting:

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